

FLINT BARN RESTAURANT

English wines and Sussex ribs



Photo: Alex Leith

I'm two days into a very painful football-related rib injury and as I walk from Drusillas car park to the nearly-adjacent Flint Cottage Restaurant (whose own space is full of vehicles) I'm really hoping that something particular is on the menu. Ribs. I want to get my own back.

To get through the restaurant you to walk through the English Wine Company, owned by the same people, which I've often passed but never visited. It's a gorgeously sunny early afternoon in early May, and I'm a bit worried when I see the low-ceilinged, white-walled interior of the place, with only one of its five or six tables surrounded by punters. It looks a little too... winter.

"Is there an outside bit?" I ask the waitress.

"Yes... but... it's not very pretty," she says. "Um, there's a fridge out there. But you can look if you like."

She's wrong; it *is* very pretty. Five or six square wooden tables sat in

a courtyard between the restaurant's wood-panelled walls and a thatched cottage. The fridge, a massive affair on a wheeled carrier, adds a welcome touch of clunky reality to affairs.

"We'll go outside," I say.

As you might expect, the English Wine Centre, which exclusively sells English wine, has a food operation that goes big on local fare, and there's nothing continental or even fusion about the menu.

I go for 'Roast Rib of Sussex beef, with a Yorkshire pudding', my companion Suzie opts for 'Roasted rump of Hankham lamb with a celeriac and parsnip mash'. They sell wine by the glass – at four quid a pop – and the menu is even more descriptive than the food card. I choose a Denbies Redlands 2009 (a red); Suzie a Stanlake Park Pinot Blush. When they arrive it's like watching Tim Henman in the early days: a pleasant surprise that something from this country can perform to such high standards.

The food arrives, in the middle of big white plates. I'd have been disappointed with the portion sizes had it been Sunday afternoon, but I'm not big-pile hungry, and both slices of beef are tender and exquisite, set off by a succulent and delicate gravy. The Yorkshire is crunchier than my mum's, but I'm pleased with it nonetheless. The highlight of the sideplate veg is the red cabbage, sweet and tender.

We've skipped some great-sounding starters, but we want afters, if only to make the experience last longer. We both go for things with alcohol in the title: I choose 'Whisky infused creamy rice pudding with spiced plum compote'; Suzie chooses what I would have gone for if she hadn't got there first, 'Chocolate and brandy pots with buttered biscuits'.

Perhaps it's not surprising with such an English-orientated place, but come coffee time afterwards, my order of a 'macchiato' creates some confusion, and they have to ascertain what it is, before making it. To their credit, it arrives perfectly formed, a fine epilogue to a fine – and cathartic – meal.

As I get up to pay, well sated and well sunned, my ribs give me a sharp reminder of something I'd completely forgotten about for over an hour. *Alex Leith*

**The English Wine Centre,
Cuckmere Barns, Alfriston Road,
Berwick. 01323 870164.**